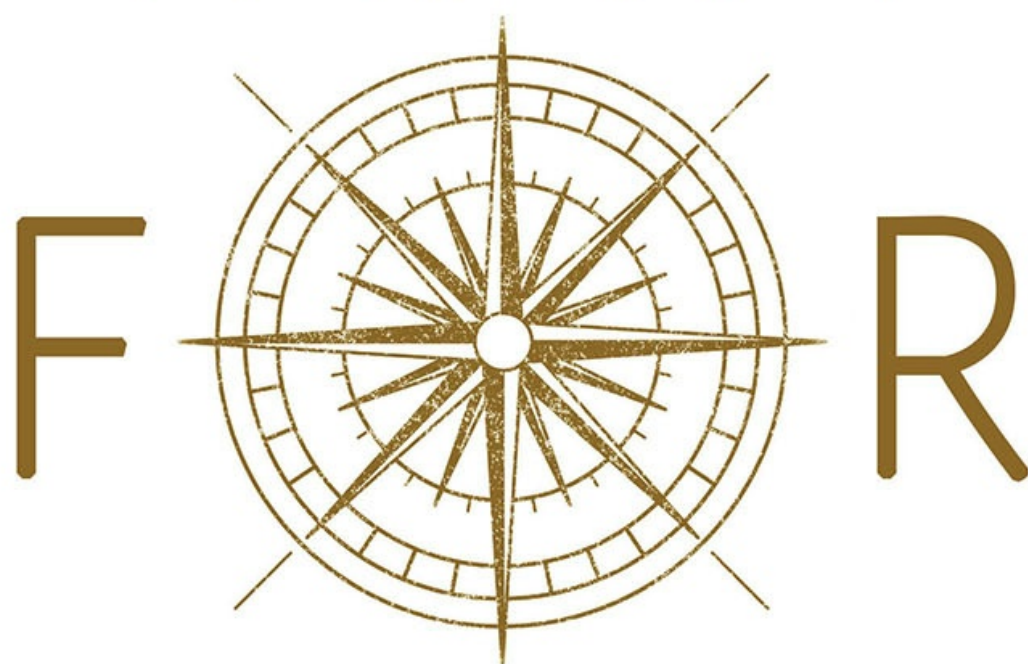


DUSTIN PETERSON

M E A N T



M O R E

WAKING UP TO THE LIFE
YOU WERE SENT TO LIVE

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WHAT IS PURPOSE AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

“He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.” —Friedrich Nietzsche³

Purpose.

It’s a word tossed around in conversations, self-help books, and leadership seminars—often attached to promises of a more fulfilling life. But for all its popularity, purpose remains a deeply misunderstood and sometimes intimidating concept.

For many of us, it feels elusive.

Am I supposed to know it already? Did I miss my chance? What if I never figure it out?

We fear that if we don’t discover our purpose quickly enough, we’ll somehow live an inferior life—one that’s less impactful, less joyful, and less aligned with God’s design for us.

But here’s the truth:

Your life has a purpose. It had a purpose before you were born.

It will have a purpose long after today’s anxieties fade into memory.

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we believe that our existence is no accident. Before we ever set foot on earth, we lived with heavenly parents who prepared us for this mortal journey. We were taught. We were loved. And we were given assignments—missions so specific and individual that no one else could fulfill them quite the way we could.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said this:

All the spirits of men, while yet in the Eternal Presence, developed aptitudes, talents, capacities, and abilities of every sort, kind, and degree. During the long expanse of life which then was, an infinite variety of talents and abilities came into being. As the ages rolled, no two spirits remained alike. Mozart became a musician; Einstein centered his interest in mathematics; Michelangelo turned his attention to painting. . . . Abraham and Moses and all of the prophets sought and obtained the talent for spirituality. . . .

When we pass from preexistence to mortality, we bring with us the traits and talents there developed. True, we forget what went before because we are here being

tested, but the capacities and abilities that then were ours are yet resident within us. Mozart is still a musician; Einstein retains his mathematical abilities; Michelangelo his artistic talent; Abraham, Moses, and the prophets their spiritual talents and abilities. . . . And all men with their infinitely varied talents and personalities pick up the course of progression where they left it off when they left the heavenly realms.⁴

We didn't just frolic around in the premortal realm, enjoying the beauties of that splendid world. This was a time of active development and of becoming more like our Father. We eventually hit a ceiling, a point after which progression would be limited if we couldn't have a mortal experience with a physical body. The plan was put forth, and Adam and Eve started their journey, opening the way for the rest of us to take the next step.

You were born into existence on this earth and brought with you a divine purpose that began in the premortal life.

Purpose isn't just about career choices.

It isn't limited to a job title, a calling, or a set of hobbies.

Your purpose is your reason for being.

It's the guiding force that shapes how you spend your time, how you face your trials, and how you leave your mark on the world.

And most importantly, purpose is powerful.

There's a longing for clarity, meaning, and direction—not just to make it through the day but to live for something that actually matters. In fact, purpose isn't just a spiritual longing—it's a human developmental need.

A CLOSER LOOK: WHAT STANFORD RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT PURPOSE

In a culture obsessed with personal success, self-expression, and chasing “what feels good,” the concept of purpose can feel both overused and underdefined. But for Dr. Bill Damon, a developmental psychologist at Stanford University and founding director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence, purpose isn't just a nice idea. It's a critical piece of human development—and one most people are missing.

Damon defines purpose as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self.”⁵ In other words, purpose isn't just about what you love. It's about what you're willing to contribute. What you're committed to. What you're building that matters to someone other than you.

In his groundbreaking book *The Path to Purpose*, Damon studied hundreds of young people across backgrounds, interests, and belief systems to understand how purpose emerges—and what happens when it doesn't. The results were sobering.

He found that *only about 20 percent of youth* in his sample could articulate anything close to a purpose in life. The rest fell into three categories:

- **The Disengaged**, who weren't searching for purpose at all;
- **The Dabblers**, who had interests but no focus or sense of direction; and
- **The Dreamers**, who had lofty goals but no concrete action or connection to service.

What's fascinating is that Damon's findings didn't just apply to young adults. As he expanded his work, he saw the same patterns repeated in adults across life stages. Many people—even high-functioning, busy, successful people—were simply going through the motions. Their calendars were full, but their lives were not anchored by any sense of deep meaning or calling.

This “purpose deficit,” Damon argues, has serious consequences. Individuals without a sense of purpose are more likely to experience anxiety, disengagement, addiction, and aimlessness. They may succeed by outward standards, but inwardly, they feel restless or stuck.

That same fog follows many of us into adulthood. We keep ourselves busy, but deep down we wonder: Is any of this adding up to something that matters?

The good news is that purpose isn't something you either have or don't. It's something that can be *discovered* and *developed*. In fact, Damon found that people who did live with purpose often found it through reflection—by making sense of past experiences, pain, passions, and moments of service. The best predictors of purpose weren't raw talent or even passion—they were intentional reflection and meaningful connection. Said a different way, your purpose isn't what you do (as in your daily work or the manifestations or expressions of your efforts) but rather why you do it and the motivating forces that drive you.

But that's exactly why your story matters. When you slow down and trace where God has been moving—even in the shadows—you start to see that the ingredients for purpose are already there. They just need to be named, claimed, and aligned with something bigger than you.

Because the truth is, you don't have to drift. You don't have to settle. And you're never too late to live on purpose. You didn't step out of line in the premortal existence and miss your chance at being assigned a life purpose.

In my work, coaching leaders at organizations and career-counseling individuals through life transitions, I'm always amazed at the number of people who feel they are devoid of purpose and just floating. They tend to believe that everyone around them has it figured out and that they're the one person on earth who missed their calling. Yet as I often tell them, which of us was armed with a clear and intentional plan at a young age for identifying our life's work? Who among us was taught in grade school how to clarify a meaningful goal toward which to direct our lives?

I certainly wasn't. I drifted through school, more interested in how to survive each class and advance through each grade. My existential reflections consisted of wondering why the Dallas sports teams of my youth seemed to languish more than other cities and why it was that we didn't eat more bacon as a society, delicious as it is.

And yet I eventually came to understand my purpose in my twenties and began to fully embrace it in my thirties. Some of the people I coach find theirs earlier, but for many, it happens later—in their forties, fifties, or even beyond. The good news is that *when* you discover your purpose matters less than how you choose to magnify it once you do.

So how do you figure it out? How do you know what your individual purpose is?

This can seem so ambiguous. “I want to be a good dad” or “I want to provide for my family” can feel important but too general. The application of it can seem so daunting or unclear.

Nine times out of ten, when I ask people “What's your purpose?” the answer is “I just want to help people.” Right. You and the gas station attendant and the grocery

worker and the server at Chick-fil-A. But there has to be something more specific to you, right?

I believe this is a great purpose in life—to discover your purpose and to give your whole heart and soul to it.

I also believe you have a very specific purpose, one that you are uniquely prepared to accomplish through your special combination of personality, talents, aptitudes, ambitions, relationships, and set of life circumstances.

First, let's define "purpose" more clearly to know what we're aiming for.

WHAT IS PURPOSE?

Bill Damon gave some clues above—purpose is stable, intentional, meaningful to self, and serves a greater good. I also love the definition of purpose from Angela Duckworth, author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, which echoes similar sentiments. She says, "Your purpose is your intention to contribute to the well-being of other people. It is a tremendously powerful source of motivation."⁶

I love this for a few reasons:

- It's intentional, as in "on purpose" (pun intended). It's something we set out to do specifically. It's not passive or accidental, and it doesn't happen *to us*. We happen *to it*.
- It's other-focused. If my purpose is only focused on me, it doesn't have pulling power. I was working with a client many years ago, trying to help him boil down his purpose to a statement of power. He said, "I think I exist to amass knowledge." I said, "Oh, I like that, but to what end? Like, why do you want to become all-knowing?" I pushed him on it. He thought about it and said, "I guess I want to learn everything so I can lift other people." The moment he said that, you could feel the energy shift in the conversation. It had pulling power. It was no longer about him and his goals but rather about lifting others to a higher plane. It's not about you. Purpose is other-focused. In fact, I often teach that the difference between purpose and goals is that purpose is about others, whereas goals are often (not always, but often) self-serving. "I want to lose ten pounds" is usually about you. Or "I want to save a million dollars" is about your future. But purpose is bigger than you.
- It's a contribution. Your purpose is about adding value and bringing the best of what you do well to bear. A few years ago, I published my book *Talented* about how to discover your God-given talents. An interesting thing occurred. People would read the book, discover their gifts, and then call me to ask, "Now what?" I was always a bit perplexed. Go use them! Put them to work! Serve others! One day, I realized what people were really asking, which was "Where do I aim them?" In other words, what's my purpose to point my talents at? This makes sense to me. Talents are what you do best, and purpose is where to direct them.
- It's motivating. This is key. Purpose is a powerful source of motivation! It drives you. It pulls you forward. When I think of my purpose, it gets me up and moving. I've had times and seasons in my life where I lose my sense of purpose, and the result is a palpable feeling of discouragement and stuckness. I'll spiral and feel lost, and then, usually in a moment of despair, I'll recall why I exist and my specific purpose on earth. Then I'll instantly feel that rapid heartbeat and warmth

in my body that drives me forward to do what I do best for the benefit of others.

In fact, purpose has been associated with some pretty incredible outcomes. People who know their purpose . . .

- Quadruple the likelihood of being engaged at work⁷
- Live up to seven years longer⁸
- Experience a 42 percent increase in happiness⁹
- Have better quality sleep¹⁰
- Have improved impulse control¹¹
- Are able to stave off depression¹²
- Reduce their mortality rate by 23 percent¹³

I even read a study a number of years ago from AARP that people who have a clearly articulated purpose statement are 125 percent more likely to get a flu shot. Ha!

Why would that be? Why is purpose associated with such great outcomes? Perhaps because when I know my “why” and am in pursuit of something greater, I’m less likely to disengage at work, rest easier at night, control my impulses (such as limiting the number of nights that I attack a bowl of Fruity Pebbles before bed), and therefore live longer.

Not only this, but one study from researchers published in *Leadership Quarterly* found that people who discover their purpose are more resilient in the face of setbacks, experience higher job satisfaction, are more productive, and experience “flow” more often, which is the sense of getting lost in your work so that time seems to fly by.¹⁴

Purpose makes you happier at work and better at what you do. And happiness plus productivity generally equates to greater success, resulting in not only intrinsic satisfaction but extrinsic rewards, like being paid, promoted, and rewarded for doing what you love!

Likewise, Anthony Burrow, who leads the Purpose and Identity Processes Lab at Cornell University, defines purpose as a central, self-organizing life aim that guides behavior and provides a sense of meaning.¹⁵ His studies reveal that individuals with a strong sense of purpose experience greater psychological resilience, improved health outcomes, and enhanced cognitive functioning.

One of Burrow’s notable findings is the relationship between purpose and stress. He discovered that individuals who possess a clear sense of purpose are better equipped to handle stress and recover from adverse events. This resilience stems from the motivational framework that purpose provides, enabling individuals to navigate challenges with a sense of direction and meaning.

Moreover, Burrow’s research indicates that purpose contributes to better mental health by reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety. Individuals with a defined purpose are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors and maintain social connections, both of which are crucial for mental well-being. If your purpose is clear, you eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep!

In practical terms, Burrow suggests that cultivating purpose doesn’t necessarily require grand achievements. Instead, it involves engaging in activities that align with one’s values and contribute to something beyond the self. This could be as simple as mentoring others, participating in community service, or pursuing personal growth endeavors.

It’s clear that our understanding of purpose is not merely a lofty ideal but a tangible asset that enhances our daily lives. By identifying and committing to meaningful goals,

we can foster resilience, improve our mental health, and lead more fulfilling lives.

PURPOSE IS POWERFUL

Suffice it to say, purpose is powerful. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that life has a purpose! And the even greater news is that you have a specific purpose, one unique to you.

Elder John C. Pingree Jr. taught the following:

God has important work for each of us. Speaking to sisters but teaching truths that apply to all, President Spencer W. Kimball taught: “Before we came [to earth, we] were given certain assignments. . . . While we do not now remember the particulars, this does not alter the glorious reality of what we once agreed to.” What an ennobling truth! Our Heavenly Father has specific and significant things for you and me to accomplish (see Ephesians 2:10).

These divine assignments are not reserved for a privileged few but are for all of us—regardless of gender, age, race, nationality, income level, social status, or Church calling. Every one of us has a meaningful role to play in furthering God’s work (see Moses 1:39).¹⁶

In the premortal realm, you were given specific assignments. President Nelson said, “The Lord has more in mind for you than you have in mind for yourself! You have been reserved and preserved for this time and place. The Lord needs you to change the world. As you accept and follow His will for you, you will find yourself accomplishing the impossible!”¹⁷

PURPOSE AS AN ANCHOR

It might sound lofty to talk about “divine missions” and “eternal impact,” but purpose also plays an intensely practical role in your everyday life.

Purpose anchors you when life gets turbulent. For example, if you lose your job or a diagnosis shakes your world, it’s easy to feel untethered—like everything solid beneath you just gave way. But if you’ve named your purpose, it gives you something stable to hold on to. You may not control the storm, but you remember why you’re still standing. Purpose becomes your anchor, reminding you who you are and what matters most, even when everything else feels uncertain.

Purpose motivates you when circumstances seem overwhelming. When your schedule is maxed out, your energy is depleted, and the pressure feels unbearable, purpose can give you a reason to keep going. You don’t move forward because it’s easy—you move forward because you know you’re called. When the “why” is clear, you find the strength to face the “how.” Purpose lifts your eyes from the mess and fixes them on the mission.

Purpose lifts you when disappointment threatens to drown your spirit. Let’s say you pour yourself into something—a relationship, a project, a dream—and it doesn’t work out the way you hoped. The door closes. The silence lingers. That’s when purpose steps in. It whispers, “This isn’t the end.” Even when the outcome falls short, purpose reminds you that your obedience still mattered, your effort still counted, and your story isn’t over yet.

A number of times in my career, I've put myself out there or applied for new opportunities that haven't panned out. I can think of a moment in particular when I was sitting on the couch watching general conference and felt inspired that I needed to apply for a certain university role. I wasn't even sure the role was posted or existed, but a quick search on the university website showed that the role had just been created and was in active recruitment. I took it as a sign. It was such a random and striking thought that I figured I'd better take action.

Over the following weeks, I cleaned up my CV, requested letters of recommendation from mentors and peers, collected old teaching evaluations from my time at Rice University and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and put forward my best application package. I tried to push the role out of my mind and let the process take its course.

After several weeks of waiting, I was notified that my application was declined and that I wasn't even being considered for first-round interviews. Like, I didn't even get the robo-interview where they make sure you're human and not some bot applying from a foreign country! I was so discouraged and confused. Was I inspired? Where did that thought come from? Why did I go through that process?

I reflected and processed this experience for some time but ultimately landed on this one key thought: The outcome of this process in no way changes my ability to maximize my individual purpose here on earth. My purpose is not bound by opportunities that others give me, nor is it at the mercy of someone else's approval. My purpose is mine to manifest, and this one rejection doesn't impede my ability to make it happen right where I am.

Purpose is an anchor.

Pause for a second and really let that sink in.

Living with purpose doesn't just help you feel better about life. It actually helps you live better—longer, stronger, and more joyfully.

But more than that, purpose connects us to the eternal plan of happiness that our Heavenly Father designed for us.

Purpose is woven into the very fabric of the plan of salvation.

- You lived with God before you came to earth (see Jeremiah 1:5).
- You agreed to come here, trusting in the Savior's Atonement to redeem you.
- You were prepared for specific missions.
- You are being shaped, right now, by mortal experiences designed to refine you into the person God knows you can become.

In other words, you are here on purpose—for a purpose.

WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

Let me be honest: There are seasons when your purpose feels murky.

I remember one such season vividly.

When I began my career, I felt totally stuck. I was at a crossroads and losing energy fast. The previous year had been glorious—I had married the woman of my dreams, moved to a new home (a.k.a. a crusty apartment in downtown Dallas), and started a new job. I was bright-eyed and ready to fulfill my mission on earth. Then reality hit.

At work, I had been assigned to work on the healthcare and hospitality team of a large public relations agency. Specifically, one of my jobs was to sit in a call booth and cold-call major media publications to pitch them on writing about my client. Unfortunately, my client was GlaxoSmithKline, and more specifically (and even more unfortunately), Beano.

Beano is a natural enzyme that fights gas. Yep, my job was to call editors and pitch them on the virtues of putting an extra-strength gas-fighting enzyme on the cover of the magazine. Suffice it to say, it was a disaster. Day after day, I sat in that little phone booth getting rejected, hung up on, and demoralized.

I remember staring at the blank wall in front of me, getting up the courage to pick up the phone and get shamed by another busy editor in chief, and wondering, “What am I doing with my life?” Like, is this what God has in store for me? This is the promise of my future? The Beano guy?

One day, I came home from work and broke down to my wife. She was standing in the kitchen, eight months pregnant, and cooking noodles in a boiling pot of water. I leaned against the living room wall to debrief the day, and she could sense something was wrong. As we talked, I slid lower and lower, then slumped down the wall into a semi-fetal position.

Imagine it: a 6’5” man coming home to an unsuspecting pregnant wife and curling up on the floor. She looked at me and asked what was wrong.

“I can’t do it anymore,” I said, exasperated. “I hate my job.”

She looked at me perplexed but patiently asked, “Okay. What do you want to do instead?”

“I don’t know,” I muttered. “That’s the problem.”

She asked what I wished I could do more of. Again, I didn’t know. Frustrated, I said, “I just don’t feel like I’m helping anyone. I’m spinning my wheels and getting nowhere.”

She picked up on the scent and pursued it. “How do you want to help people?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I just want to help people grow. Help them tap their potential. I want to help them *maximize* their potential.”

The flame of energy started to flicker and brighten.

“What would that look like?” she asked.

I didn’t know, and it would take some time to sort it out, but that singular statement—to *maximize human potential*—became my rallying cry, my purpose. All other decisions about my career were filtered through that statement. Does it help me maximize others’ potential? Then I’ll do it.

That little flame of desire—shaky and tentative at first—became the fire that fueled the next decade of my life. From graduate school at Indiana University to jobs in leadership development and now to leading Proof Leadership Group, my desire to help others maximize their potential has driven each move and clarified each step. The outcomes have been powerful. I can honestly say that I’ve experienced many of the results previously cited in research around purpose: less stress, more engagement, higher energy, more prosperity, less likelihood to eat a nightly bowl of Fruity Pebbles, *and* I got a flu shot. Purpose facilitates decision-making.

Perhaps your purpose has become murky. Maybe you’re wandering a bit in the desert. You might even feel like you’re stuck on “repeat,” acting out the same day over and over. If so, I get it. Also, you’re normal. This doesn’t mean you’re the one person

who is devoid of purpose—it just might mean that you need to get some clarity. You may have drifted, or your daily actions may not align with your overarching purpose.

Again, our sense of meaning and purpose can ebb and flow. Two things I've found consistently among the leaders I work with as a trainer and executive coach are that people seem to either have (1) a clearly defined purpose without day-to-day activities to match, or (2) they have lots of meaningful daily actions but no clearly defined purpose to drive toward. In either case, the result is the same.

Flatness. Stuckness. And a general sense of malaise.

Imagine my surprise in 2020, after a strong fifteen-year career in leadership development and career coaching, when I hit a wall. I had emerged from my Beano funk, found a new line of work, pursued education, joined amazing companies, and ultimately built a successful business. But there I was, forty years old and feeling stuck again. The reasons merit a book of their own, but the SparkNotes version is simple: I was doing lots of things each day—important things—but had drifted from my ultimate purpose, to *maximize human potential*.

A clear purpose helps you self-assess, realign, and move forward. But again, purpose is about more than career clarity.

THE GOSPEL POWER BEHIND PURPOSE

As we've covered so far, purpose isn't just a "nice to have."

It's a spiritual necessity.

In Moses 1:39, the Lord declares, "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."

God Himself has a purpose. And His purpose revolves around you. If God's eternal work is centered on helping you grow, progress, and return to Him, then surely your life's purpose must also be tied to becoming something greater and helping others do the same.

Your purpose is your personal participation in God's work.

Read that again: Your purpose, no matter what it is, will be the way that you participate in God's purpose.

It might look like:

- Building a family where faith thrives.
- Teaching others with patience and joy.
- Creating beauty that lifts souls.
- Healing wounds—physical, emotional, or spiritual.
- Defending truth and light in a world growing increasingly dark.
- Stabilizing individuals and families.
- Developing structure for others to thrive.

Whatever your specific mission is, it will always connect back to bringing light, hope, and goodness into the world—and leading souls, including your own, back to Him. Remember what we learned earlier about outward focus—purpose always exists to serve a greater good.

In fact, some of the greatest unhappiness you will experience in this life will come from the pursuit of self-serving goals. You'll pour endless effort and focus into achieving them, only to discover that your house, bank account, and garage are full but your

bucket is still empty.

WHY WE STRUGGLE TO FEEL PURPOSEFUL

If knowing your purpose is so essential, why does it feel so hard to grasp sometimes?

Because we live in a mortal world filled with:

- **Noise:** Every voice around you (and inside your own head) is telling you what you should do, who you should be, and how you should live.
- **Comparison:** Social media makes it dangerously easy to measure your worth against curated images of other people's highlight reels.
- **Busyness:** Constant demands on your time can crowd out reflection, prayer, and the quiet spaces where God speaks.
- **Pain:** Trauma, disappointment, and failure can make you question your worth and your ability to make a difference.

All these forces create what I call Purpose Fog—a hazy, confusing atmosphere that makes it hard to see your divine direction clearly. But fog doesn't erase the road. It only obscures it for a time.

The path God placed you on is still there—solid and real—even when the mist around you feels thick and disorienting. Our job is to keep walking in faith until the next step becomes clear.

CLUES TO YOUR PURPOSE ARE ALREADY WITHIN YOU

Here's something that might surprise you: You already have all the raw materials you need to understand your purpose.

It's not about chasing something brand-new. Your purpose isn't "out there" somewhere waiting to be tripped over. It's about noticing what God has already been weaving into your life from the beginning.

Some clues include:

- **What you love naturally:** What activities, topics, or causes make you feel most alive?
- **Where you excel effortlessly:** What strengths and skills do you seem to have an instinct for?
- **What breaks your heart:** What injustices, needs, or hurts stir deep emotion in you?
- **What hardships you've survived:** What pain have you endured that has shaped your compassion, resilience, or wisdom?

I often ask coaching clients to finish these simple sentences:

- "I feel most alive when I _____."
- "People often come to me for help with _____."
- "If I could fix one problem in the world, it would be _____."

- “When I was a kid, I dreamed of _____.”

Your answers to those questions aren't random. They are fingerprints of your divine mission. We'll discuss this even more in depth in the next few chapters, including concrete examples, but I want you to start considering that God has already planted clues in you to help you gain this clarity. He wants you to feel like you have direction!

A few months back, I was listening to a podcast interview with Brad Wilcox, former counselor in the General Young Men's Presidency of the Church and a current professor at Brigham Young University (BYU). Stephen Jones led the interview, and I heard a beautiful and simple example of clarified purpose in a story Brother Wilcox recounted.¹⁸

He talked about an experience many years ago when he met the then-prophet, President Spencer W. Kimball. Brother Wilcox was part of a cast of performers for “My Turn on Earth” in Salt Lake, and they got notice that President Kimball and his family would be in attendance. He was teaching Sunday School at the time and asked the youth what they would say to President Kimball if they had the chance to meet him. One boy would ask if the prophet knew how to water-ski, and another commented that he'd like to know if they wear makeup in general conference. One girl said she'd just tell him she loves him.

So the next night, after the performance, they took the small cast to meet President Kimball before he got in his car. The prophet asked Brother Wilcox what his calling was in the Church at the time and what he had taught the youth the day before. Brother Wilcox told him about his lesson with the youth, that the youth said they loved him, and that he loved him.

President Kimball then did something surprising. He wrapped his arms around Brother Wilcox and held him—not just hugged him but *held him*. And he said he'd never forget that experience. He then said, “I think that was one of the experiences that helped me find one of my missions in life. *It's to love*. And it's to try to let people feel the Savior's love by saying ‘I love you’ when they live in a world where their fathers and so many people that should say those words just don't. But it's one of the reasons I was born, and it was President Kimball who taught me that” (emphasis added).

No experience in life is wasted, and each has the potential to reveal your greater purpose. Since then, Brother Wilcox has used that simple purpose to align his actions in his career, family, and callings in the Church. “I exist to love.” Purpose brings clarity and direction.

Your life experiences reveal your purpose, and once you know your purpose, you can devote your life to aligning your day-to-day actions to fulfill it, as Brother Wilcox has.

GOD'S PATTERN FOR PURPOSE DISCOVERY

Throughout scripture, we see a beautiful, consistent pattern for how God reveals purpose to His children:

1. He plants a desire.
2. He prepares through experiences, oftentimes difficult.
3. He reveals through small moments of inspiration.
4. He empowers through covenants and grace.

Think about Moses.

Before he led Israel out of Egypt, he lived as a prince—learning leadership. Then as a shepherd—learning patience. Then as a prophet—learning to trust revelation.

Each season seemed disconnected at first. But in hindsight, it was obvious: God was shaping him for his purpose all along.

The same is true for you. No season is meaningless. No trial is pointless. God is always preparing you—even when you can't see it yet.

LIVING PURPOSEFULLY EVEN WHEN YOU FEEL SMALL

Sometimes, even after you catch glimpses of your purpose, you'll still feel small. You'll still wonder:

- Does this even matter?
- Am I making any difference at all?
- Wouldn't someone else do this better?

Let me be clear: Living your purpose doesn't always feel glamorous. It often looks like small, repeated acts of obedience, love, and perseverance. It looks like:

- Listening patiently to a lonely neighbor.
- Changing a diaper at 2 a.m. without resentment.
- Writing the first rough draft of a book no one has asked for—yet.
- Bearing your testimony in sacrament meeting even when your hands shake.
- Staying kind in a workplace that feels hostile.

Heaven doesn't measure greatness the way the world does. Purpose isn't about the size of your audience. It's about the size of your willingness.

President Dallin H. Oaks taught, "The final judgment is not just a summation of good and evil acts—what we have done. It is based on the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have become."¹⁹

Purpose isn't something you "achieve" once and for all.

It's something you become—little by little, grace by grace.

PURPOSE IN HIDDEN SEASONS

There will be seasons when your purpose feels obvious—when doors swing open and blessings pour down.

But there will also be seasons when it feels hidden—when progress is invisible, when prayers seem unanswered, when it takes every ounce of faith to keep moving forward.

Don't be discouraged by the hidden seasons.

Remember the parable of the seed planted in the earth.

Growth happens underground long before it bursts into view.

When you continue nurturing your faith, serving others, and living with integrity even when no one sees, you are living your purpose powerfully. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf beautifully reassures:

God will take you as you are at this very moment and begin to work with you. All you need is a willing heart, a desire to believe, and trust in the Lord. Gideon saw himself as a poor farmer, the least of his father's house. But God saw him as a mighty man of valor. When Samuel chose Saul to be king, Saul tried to talk him out of it. Saul was from one of the smallest tribes of the house of Israel. How could he be king? But God saw him as "a choice young man." Even the great prophet Moses felt so overwhelmed and discouraged at one point that he wanted to give up and die. But God did not give up on Moses.

My dear brothers and sisters, if we look at ourselves only through our mortal eyes, we may not see ourselves as good enough. But our Heavenly Father sees us as who we truly are and who we can become. He sees us as His sons and daughters, as beings of eternal light with everlasting potential and with a divine destiny.²⁰

A PREVIEW OF WHAT'S AHEAD

In this chapter, we've explored:

- Why purpose matters spiritually, emotionally, and physically.
- How God's eternal plan includes a personalized mission for you.
- The common reasons purpose feels confusing—and why that's normal.
- Practical steps to begin uncovering the divine fingerprints already in your life.

But we're just getting started.

In the chapters that follow, you'll learn how to:

- Dig into your past experiences through the Journey Map.
- Create a clear and inspiring personal purpose statement.
- Overcome the "villains" that try to keep you small.
- Build a daily life that reflects your divine mission.
- Stay connected to personal revelation as your purpose evolves.

Your purpose is not something to be invented.

It's something to be remembered.

You already made promises before you came to earth. You already carry within you the seeds of a great and holy work. Now—with faith, courage, and a willing heart—it's time to uncover them and live them out.

Are you ready?

Let's do it.

REFLECTION EXERCISE : YOUR PURPOSE CLUES

Take a journal or notebook and write down honest answers to the following:

- What have been the most joyful experiences of your life?

- What challenges have left a permanent mark on your heart?
- What are you naturally good at—even when you don't try hard?
- What compliments do you frequently receive from others?
- If money, fear, and time weren't factors, how would you spend your days?
- What kinds of people or causes do you feel called to serve?

Sit with these questions.

Pray over them.

Ask Heavenly Father to open your heart and help you notice what He's already placed inside of you.

Remember, discovering your purpose isn't about forcing answers.

It's about noticing the answers that are already there.

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